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On Giving Salt to Buffaloes: Ritual as Communication

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121 In a recent work on the anthropology of religion, Wallace (1966: 233) suggests that ritual is "communication without information," each ritual being "a particular sequence of signals which, once announced, allows no uncertainty, no choice, and hence . . . conveys no information from sender to receiver." Wallace is apparently using the word "information" in too narrow a sense. Ritual acts are necessarily repetitive but, far from erasing information, this repetition assures people that the basic values and institutions on which their society rests still retain their validity. Such a reassurance is conveyed in the symbolism of a ritual, and apparently has the effect of reducing anxiety in a community. The present essay will analyze a particular Indian ritual so as to show that this (like any other calendrical ritual) does indeed communicate a very important message: "All is going to be well for our community!"

The process of communication takes many forms in modern India. Some information flows to the populace from the mass media of radio, press, film, and poster; other information reaches people through the linkages in different types of personal chains or networks. Some of these networks are official; they link villagers with *panchayat* board, with district government officials, and then with the state governments. Others are unofficial, but very deeply entrenched and important in daily life. Their structure and use vary according to whether they link village and town, village and village, or the members of a single hamlet. Village-and-town networks operate through the linkage of villagers who spend considerable time in town and have influential or knowledgeable friends there. Intervillage networks may link persons in neighboring villages who co-operate to stage annual festivals, or they may be based on a pattern of marriage and visiting relationships. The intravillage networks may also have a kinship basis, but there are further types of network within the village which link individuals to certain centers of influence and information—the village headman and council, the educated younger men, the festival committee, and the gossiping groups. These village networks can be defined as the sequences of personal contacts that must be made if anyone is to influence or be influenced by people in any of the loci of power, i.e., those groups of people who control an optimum of locally useful information.

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A ritual is not a network, but it is a medium of communication and provides an occasion for the personnel of all the networks of the village to converge in one place and act out their public roles. Ceremonial events are thus events of communication in two distinct senses. First, the confluence of people allows many local information networks to be reactivated; someone asks about getting a loan, another seeks opinions on a land dispute, a third takes a look at some potential brides. Second, the ritual itself conveys information to the participants. As we shall demonstrate, this message is a dramatization of the idea that the community is stable and its future assured.

The Todas, Kotas, and Badagas, three communities on the Nilgiri Plateau[1] in Southern India, are all cattle-keepers. For the Todas buffalo herding is the major occupation; for the Badagas it is subsidiary to agriculture; and for the Kotas it is subsidiary to both agriculture and a variety of traditional handicrafts. Each of these groups now keeps cattle only for their milk products, though until several decades ago the Badagas and Kotas also used oxen for drawing their ploughs.[2] Each group gives salt to its herds once or more a year and each culture has a complex ceremonial for feeding the salt to the cattle.

Confining ourselves to the Badagas,[3] we now ask a question that would in fact be equally pertinent to the case of the Todas or the Kotas: why is the giving of salt a day-long ceremony instead of merely a routine act of animal husbandry? Why are so many people and so much time involved in what a single boy could do in half an hour? The Badagas themselves would answer this question by invoking the "force of tradition"; but surely tradition is not *per se* an adequate explanation for the persistence of such a ceremony. The Badagas also maintain what is to them a perfectly rational explanation for the act of giving salt to their cattle. After heavy rains the young grass "tastes saltless," and the herds graze unenthusiastically; their owners make up this dietary deficiency by giving salt to the animals. The explanation suggests that these people understand something of the leaching process, but it certainly does not answer our original question: why has the act of salt-giving become a major annual ceremony?

Salt is regularly given to the cattle in March and at the end of December; in years when the grass is "saltless" a third dosage is given, generally in the month of June. On all three occasions the salt is given to the animals on a Monday, the weekly holiday of the Badagas, but it is only in March that the event is treated ceremonially.[4]

In the various writings abut the Badagas during the past 150 years there are only two brief references (Benbow 1928: 32-33; Karl 1945: 17), both fairly recent, to this salt-giving ceremony. Nevertheless it seems certain that the ceremony has a considerable antiquity; the comparable Toda ceremony was mentioned by Father Finicio in 1603 (Rivers 1906: 726). The Badagas did not become literate until the present century, yet they have an extensive and generally credible body of orally transmitted history relating to their way of life in the days shortly before the British settled in the Nilgiri Hills (i.e., prior to 1820). These Badaga accounts are explicit about

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salt being one of the few items that the hill people used to carry up from market towns on the plains during their annual trading expeditions.[5] We may perhaps infer that the salt-giving was already a ceremony from the tradition that the men in these parties who were carrying salt specifically to give to their buffaloes were supposed to keep themselves in a ritually pure state, and were not allowed to carry any other trade items at the same time. One man would therefore carry salt for a number of men in the trading party, and they in turn would carry his purchases. Salt intended for domestic use was never treated with such reverence. Once a market had been established in the new British hill town of Ootacamund, *ca.* 1825, these old trading expeditions fell into abeyance because the Badagas could then purchase salt without having to leave the hills.[6]

The annual ceremony, of giving "new-grass salt," called *'ka:ruppu*, is performed separately by each hamlet in March of every year, on the Monday that falls within the eight days following the new moon. At about the time of the new moon itself one man is selected from every household in each hamlet to represent that family; generally the head of the family assumes the role, unless the purificatory preparations are too burdensome for him.

Early in the morning of the ceremony, after the house has been purified, each of these men goes out to his cattle shed and brings in the salt he has purchased. This coarse salt is then powdered in a mortar inside the house with a special iron bar supplied by the Kota craftsmen.

At the appropriate time the hamlet headman comes along each street calling out, "Are you ready?" Each celebrant then picks up his powdered salt in its basket[7] and stands near the doorway. At a signal from the headman, the man who represents the Great House (i.e., that of the hamlet's founding family) is the first to leave his doorway. He goes and stands on the village green, and all of the other men selected immediately come out and line up behind him. They then start off for the stream where the salt-feeding will take place. The man from the Great House stays in the lead. At some distance behind this party of celebrants other members of their families follow, driving the cattle or just coming along to watch; but no women can be present.

This group goes to the bank of a stream near the hamlet, carrying their baskets of salt, iron rods, pots, and hoes. Near the stream the man from the Great House digs a shallow, round hole with his hoe, two to three feet wide and a foot deep. The other men then follow suit, each using his own hoe to dig a hole for his own cattle. During the present century, however, the Badaga cattle herds have become much smaller than before, and so only one man from each lineage is usually selected to dig a pit for all the cattle belonging to that lineage. (Generally a Badaga hamlet is made up of three or four lineages, one at least of which is recognized as having descended from the hamlet founder.) After each of these pits has been dug, the loose dirt in it is brushed out with a branch of the *'hubbe* plant.[8]

The sun is now in the east, for it is still morning. When the pits have been dug, the man from the Great House takes a handful of salt from his

basket and goes to the bank of the stream, facing toward the sun. In one hand he holds a pot. The rest of the men do likewise, taking care to stand downstream from the leader. Each has a handful of salt and a pot, and each wears a cotton shawl which leaves the entire right arm bare.

The leader (usually prompted in a whisper by some one else who knows it better) then pronounces the following prayer (pausing at the end of each line, whereupon the rest of the party repeats the last word in lieu of saying the entire line over):

O Lord [Swami], we today celebrate things as our
fathers, grandfathers and forefathers have done.
Old is not new, and new is not old [i.e., old things
are not neglected, nor new things added].
Whatever we sow, may it grow more than ninefold.
Whichever female cattle conceive, may they give us
plenty of milk.
Whatever we put on the threshing ground, may it not be
wasted [i.e., may all the grain reach the store
without mishap].
O God, may the cow or young buffalo be impregnated by
the male just after getting its second teeth.
Just before getting its fourth teeth, may its calf walk.
May the house be filled with children, and may the pen
be filled with cattle.
Let everything be good. *Hau hau!*

The prayer is uttered in this fashion three times. At the end of the second recital the men shout "*hau hau*" twice, and at the end of the third they shout it at least three times, in expression of their happiness.

As the final words of this prayer are uttered, each man stoops beside the stream, still with his salt in one hand and pot in the other. He mixes the salt in the running water and catches some of this saline solution in the pot.

The leader then takes his pot of brine and pours it into the pit that he dug. The other men follow suit. Then all the cows and oxen, but not the buffaloes, are driven to the pits to drink. When the animals have emptied a pit, more water is thrown in and further salt added without additional ceremony. Only after the cows and oxen wander away from these pits are the buffaloes finally allowed their drink of brine. A few of the men then refill their pots with water and pour it over the backs of the animals "to cool them."

When this phase of the proceedings is completed, each man fills his pot with water again and then sits down in the grass nearby. At this point one or two Todas, who have been waiting for this moment, come forward and approach each Badaga in turn. The Badagas give most of the salt remaining in their baskets to these Toda friends.

After this, one of the Badagas goes to a dewberry bush and cuts off a branch. This is regarded as a ritual, and is done with a small knife made by

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Kotas especially for this purpose. Sprigs from the branch are distributed, and every man places a small sprig on top of the salt that remains in his basket. A branch is also cut from the hill gooseberry and distributed in exactly the same way.

The celebrants now return to their homes, again led by the man from the Great House. Other male members of each family may follow this party, driving the buffaloes and carrying the hoes. Each man in the ceremonial party, however, has to carry his own potful of water, his iron rod, and his basket (which now contains a little salt, the two twigs mentioned, and also a remaining piece of the *'hubbe* that has otherwise been used as a brush). As the men walk they chant *"hau hau,"* an expression of their happiness. When they reach the hamlet they shout *"ki:i:ki,"* which means, "It is finished." Then the party splits up. Each member goes to his calves and gives them a taste of the salty water he has brought back. After that he is ready to enter his house.

There is still more ritual to be performed, however, for the man must enter his house in a prescribed way. As he comes toward the entrance, the oldest woman in the family stands just inside the inner room, leaning out through its doorway in such a way that she can also see through the entrance to the house. As soon as she sees the man coming across the front yard, she asks him three times in succession, "Have all the cattle drunk salt well?" He answers "Yes" each time. During this interchange the man continues walking but his pace is measured so that he will not enter the house until he has said "Yes" for the third time. On reaching the doorway he is careful to step auspiciously across the threshold with the right foot first.

Once inside the house he stands the iron rod against the wall near the door, and then puts the basket of salt on top of the hole in the floor where grain is usually crushed and where the salt was powdered earlier. The woman then comes from the inner room, takes the three sprigs from this basket, and hangs them from the ceiling of the outer room. She carries the basket to the inner room, which is a kitchen and dining room, and she uses up whatever salt remains in cooking a meal. During the whole performance of the salt-giving ceremony she should use no other salt than this. (Nowadays she has generally finished cooking by the time the man returns home, and so just adds a pinch of his salt to the prepared meal.)

The meal which is served at this time to the members of the household differs from ordinary morning meals in certain respects. The man who has represented the family in the salt-giving ceremony is served before everyone else; ordinarily this would only occur when no other adult male members of the family were present. Furthermore, he is served in the outer room of the house, although meals are otherwise eaten in the inner room, where they are cooked. He eats butter first of all; the rice and vegetable curry follow. Afterwards he must wash his hands in cold water; usually he washes in hot.

During the afternoon each of the celebrants carries his pot of water to the cattle pen and there pours it on the ground. Again the man from the

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796 Great House precedes everyone else and afterwards announces for the benefit of others that he has completed his duty. Only after the water has been poured into his cattle pen may anyone go beyond the hamlet boundaries.

796 During the rest of the day, however, no one may do any outdoor work, not even something as trivial as picking up firewood. The permitted 784 exceptions to this rule are that people may wash themselves and their clothes, and that the men may clean out their cattle sheds and prepare bedding for the cattle. Until recently a heavy fine was levied on anyone trying to do other kinds of work on this day.

771 This ceremony is generally considered by the Badagas to be one of the most important, or as some put it, "most sacred," in the entire calendar of (796) festivals. That it should be so may seem surprising, in view of the unimportant role that cattle now play in the economy of this culture. We might 121 expect that festivals celebrated at times of sowing or harvest would be the most significant for an agricultural community such as the Badagas. Yet the giving of salt is widely held to be quite as crucial as either the sowing or the harvest festival.

What, then, is it about giving salt to cattle that makes this event so essential to the festival calendar of this particular society? My answer would be that in the course of this ceremony a symbolic reference is made to all the roots of social stability and all the sources of the good life. Every society needs certain occasions when the bases of its organization and the ideals by which it lives are made visible to the members of that society. In this respect the Badagas are in no way unusual; the salt-giving is in fact a time when the whole community is busily engaged in acting out various roles which make the foundations of social life apparent to its members. Values which guide the community are thus paraded in the ceremony, a 121 display which helps preserve them from doubt and obscurement.

A person's requirements for attaining the good life are summarized in 539 the prayer which is spoken beside the stream. Here reference is made to 782 maintaining long-established traditions, to having a plentiful harvest, to 796 a superfluity of milk, and to the birth of many calves and children. The final line, "Let everything be good!" underlines the intent of the whole ceremony.

121 The Badagas themselves do everything possible on this occasion to ensure that things will in reality become "good" for them. They show due def- 796 erence at every point to the living representative of their hamlet's founding family, who built the Great House and so started their community. They reward the Todas for their friendship and services. They pay brief respect to Ganga, the goddess who is represented in all streams and who controls rainfall. They pay respect to the sun, source of all light, by facing it before they stoop beside the stream. They show gratitude to the cattle, which are an important source of food and were formerly the indispensable laborers of every farmer. They ceremoniously gather specimens of two useful wild plants. Their route takes them to what have traditionally been the most sacred places in every Badaga hamlet: the Great House, the village green,

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121 the stream, the cattle shed, and the hearth. Furthermore, the participants in
796 this ceremony do all they can to insure that they are in a state of purity,
and that they do nothing to cause a mishap during this particular day.

783 Let us now examine these points in more detail. The requirements of
ritual purity and bodily cleanliness are a *sine qua non* for the performance
of any ceremony. If a man does not approach the gods with the knowledge
that he has done all that he can to be in a pure state, he has little hope that
715 his prayers will be answered. In pre-British days, when the salt had to be
purchased in the plains below, it received special treatment from the mo-
437 ment of purchase onward to insure that it would not become polluted
439 before the ceremony. The men who were to carry the salt up the mountain
439 slopes were not to carry anything else; contact with ordinary foodstuffs
783 would pollute this particular salt. The annual trading expeditions were
normally timed so as to fall a few weeks before the salt-giving ceremony.
Nowadays a Badaga simply buys his own salt in the town market and
brings it home without special ritual precautions.

231 High in the roof of each cattle shed are shelves on which various dairy
778 articles are stored. The man who brings the salt home is supposed to take it
straight to the cattle shed and place it on one of these shelves; he must not
783 bring it directly into his house, even though he will later have to do so
when the ceremony is about to begin. It is felt that the salt would become
polluted in the house if it were brought into an unpurified room where
sexual activity has occurred. The cattle shed, though not considered a temple
like the Toda dairy, is a pure and sacred place because milk is stored
783 there. When the salt is finally brought into each purified house for powder-
ing, it is whisked around the mortar with the help of a freshly cut twig
796 of wild *'hubbe* (also used for loosening any salt that remains on the bottom
(824) of the basket). The Badagas have two kinds of broom, one for indoor use
and one for outside; but both are considered impure because of what they
(412) have come in contact with, and so cannot be used for sweeping the salt
(183) around while it is being powdered. The used part of the *'hubbe* branch is
thrown away after this, and the unused remainder is placed on top of the
salt. From the time of purchase onward, this salt is always carried in a
special basket kept only for this purpose.

783 It is not only the salt that must be kept in a ritually pure state; the
man selected to perform the ceremony on behalf of each household is also
under certain restrictions. From the day of the new moon until after the
salt has been given to the cattle this man must not shave, have sexual re-
lations, cut his finger or toe nails, or stay overnight anywhere other than
in his own home. By observing all these prohibitions he is believed to build
(165) up a state of personal purity. (Were a man to cut his hair and shave, it
would suggest he had recently attended a funeral and was still in the
inauspicious state of mourning for a deceased relative.) The culmination
of this spiritual preparation comes on the night preceding the ceremony,
when he must sleep alone on a sack on the earthen floor, wearing cotton
and without any other bedding.

(356) Early the following morning the house has to be purified too. After the

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356 783 (237) womenfolk have bathed, they clean the house thoroughly, sprinkle the floor with fresh, semi-liquid cowdung (in Indian thinking, a purifier), and then bring a clean supply of water into the house in clean pots. Not until these preliminaries have been completed and the house can also be considered pure is the man allowed to go to the cattle shed and bring the new salt into his house for powdering.

783 796 By the time the representatives of each family are ready to leave their houses, therefore, they have done all that they possibly can to insure that their persons, their homes, and their salt are in a ritually pure condition. From this point onward there is no further attempt to increase their purity; instead the men lavish care on making no inauspicious slip in their movements.

796 (824) (787) This is thought to be a joyful ceremony, and the acts done to promote an auspicious atmosphere are many. Strings of hill mango[9] leaves are hung over the doorways of the houses to indicate that an auspicious ceremony is in progress. As the men prepare to leave their houses with the salt, there are careful precautions to insure that the man from the Great House is the first to step outside; it would be an ill-omened lack of deference should anyone else precede him. He goes and stands on the *'hattane*, the village green, but he is careful to face away from the houses. The other men to perform the ceremony then line up behind him; were the leader to look around it would indicate that he was faltering or turning back from the performance of an auspicious ceremony.

(787) Thus when the man from the Great House feels that it is time to start off toward the stream with his followers, he cannot look behind, but he asks if all of them have come. The reply that the men give must always be "Yes"; again, it would mean an ill-omened delay for them to answer otherwise. If the leader suspects that in fact the party is not yet ready to leave, he may pose his question in an indirect fashion, as for example, "We are proceeding." If some men have still to reach the green, the reply will be a half-assent such as, "You can if you want to." A negative answer should never be given. If everyone necessary is present, on the other hand, someone merely says "Yes."

It is important that nobody, even in casual conversation, use phrases such as "it is finished" or "it is completed," from the time they leave their houses until they return to the hamlet again. This too would be most inauspicious. The logic underlying the proscription, according to one old man, is that "we should not limit, finish, or complete our society."

While en route to the stream the party must never stop; nothing must block them in the performance of such a beneficial ceremony. Should they meet any other group of people, the latter must give way; and if the other group is going to an inauspicious ceremony such as a funeral they should hide out of sight of the salt-bearing party. (This is also true of the return home afterwards.) Throughout this journey the man from the Great House must remain in front of everyone else, and when they reach (576) the stream he must dig his pit first. Deference to him is expressed again

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when the men stand beside the stream, for it is important that he stand upstream of everyone else so that the water he uses will be purer than that taken by the others (since it is untouched by their hands). While this ceremony is being performed it is also important that no one present, even a headman, wear a turban. The head of each participant must be bare in deference to the leader. When the men are ready to pour brine into the pits they must wait until the leader has done so. And when finally water is poured into their cattle pens the man from the Great House must again be the first to do so.

The prayer, led by this man, is spoken three times. When each participant returns home he is asked three times whether the cattle have drunk well; he answers three times in the affirmative; then a woman hangs up three sprigs from the ceiling. Badagas believe that performing any ritual act thrice makes it especially efficacious.

The foregoing acts, all aimed at insuring an auspicious atmosphere during the ceremony, are but a backdrop to the real business of the day: the expression of hope and gratitude to cattle, friends, and nature.

Man's indebtedness to his cattle is expressed on this occasion not only by feeding them salt (which they are thought to enjoy); often when the cattle are being brought together in the hamlet before being taken to the salt pits they are washed and decked with garlands. After they have drunk their fill of brine it is believed that they feel intoxicated, and so the owners pour water over the backs of the animals to cool them. During the afternoon the only work men are permitted to do outside is to make the cattle sheds more comfortable by cleaning or repairing them.

Man's dependence upon wild plants is also given expression during this ceremony. We have already mentioned the use of *'hubbe* as a brush. A part of it is also used for sweeping out loose dirt when the pits are dug. This used piece is thrown away, but a sprig of *'hubbe* is still kept on top of the salt and is later carried back to the house. Along with this *'hubbe*, sprigs of two thorn bushes are carried in the basket. When the man has entered his home, these three sprigs are hung from the ceiling. They indicate to the household that the ceremony has been completed without mishap, that the family has participated in the occasion, that the house has been purified, and that hopes for the future are bright. The value of wild plants is also recalled at this time; both thorn bushes (the dewberry and the hill gooseberry) are a favorite source of sweet, edible fruits. In addition, the wood of the hill gooseberry is very strong, and in earlier days served as material for walking-sticks. It still has an important religious role, as it is used for making ritual fire by friction. The axle in a Badaga's household grindstone is also made of this wood, and the buds and leaves of the hill gooseberry are used in a common medicine for constipation.

As the men walk home behind the man from the Great House they continuously chant *"hau hau," "e: hau hau," "ho: hau hau,"* or *"hau ko."* Every one of these interjections is an expression of happiness. Each participant is careful to enter his house with the right foot crossing the

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threshold first; to plant the left foot before the right would bring the ceremony to a most inauspicious end.

Even though the ceremony has concluded, the men who have performed in it take various precautions to insure that they retain their state of purity for the remainder of the day. The meal that they eat is a vegetarian one; thus they avoid polluting themselves and their houses by having meat cooked on this occasion. To start the meal with butter is very auspicious, since eating butter is in Badaga thinking a sign of affluence and good luck. When the men have finished the meal they are careful to wash in cold water—the prescribed means of washing whenever Badagas wish to remain in a pure state. Afterwards they can clean and repair the cattle shed if they wish, for this is a meritorious act performed in a sacred place. Otherwise the only permitted activities are the cleaning of their clothes and of themselves.

Finally, we must consider the social relations which are given expression during the ceremony. The various sources of the community's welfare and of its power structure are reflected in the ceremony, albeit in symbolic reference. The family is represented usually by its male head, otherwise by a chosen male representative. The lineage is nowadays symbolized in the common pit used by all the cattle of each lineage. The entire hamlet community is represented in concerted action by the party of men who come from every household in the hamlet, as well as by the man from the Great House who is the living descendant of the founding ancestor.

One curious element is the habit of feeding each celebrant afterwards in the outer, less sanctified, room of his house. Men regularly eat in the inner room; the people who normally must eat in the outer room are the women and all visitors from lower-status phratries of the Badaga community. It would seem that the man who gives salt to his cattle is confident of his own ritual purity and that of his entire house on this occasion. By eating in the outer room he suggests that status differences between men and women, and between his phratry and others, are of no importance provided ritual purity prevails. This attitude is also reflected in other aspects of Badaga culture: people of higher and lower ranking clans intermarry, both hypergamously and hypogamously, and members of lower ranking phratries sometimes participate in the temple rituals of higher phratries without polluting the temples.

Women are excluded altogether from the salt-giving ceremony, if only because there is a risk that the presence of a ritually unclean woman might subvert the benefits looked for from God on this auspicious occasion. And yet the women do play a necessary "backstage" role in cleaning the house, decorating it, bringing in water, and cooking the meal. Segregation of women from the ceremony underlines a basic fact of hamlet organization: the hamlet is exogamous, and hence all wives in it are "outsiders," members initially of other hamlets. Furthermore, women inherit neither land nor cattle. Symbolically the ceremony concludes an annual pact between the men and God for the fruitful blessing of crops, cattle, and children, all of which in Badaga law belong to men alone. Even so, the oldest woman

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562 796 in each family acts out the ritual of inquiring after the cattle when the salt-giver returns home. Her questioning of him, her standing inside the kitchen, her hanging up of the three sprigs, her cooking with the special salt, and her feeding of this man before the others constitute a reaffirmation of her household role: she must keep the house tidy, cook the meals, and be solicitous of the man's needs and interests.

622 796 [554] The hamlet headman (who is normally one of the participants in the ceremony) yields precedence to the leader from the Great House on this occasion. The head of each Great House is a kind of priest, while the hamlet headman is essentially a secular official. The headman is responsible for whatever small arrangements are required in staging this ceremony. It is he who should send a message to the relevant Toda friends telling them when the ceremony will be held, and it is he who is responsible for deciding when to begin the procession out of the hamlet. Normally a headman may [554] [576] wear a turban at all times, but on this particular occasion he wears no turban, out of deference to the man from the Great House, the representative of the village's origin.

178 648 The Todas are bound to Badagas by a very complex system of exchanges (Rivers 1906). In the days before a Nilgiri market was opened, the Badaga salt-giving ceremony was the major source for salt needed by the Toda tribe. Today the gift of salt to Todas is still a recognition by Badagas of the help the Todas extend them in various matters connected with herding.

796 648 Kotas, unlike Todas, are considered a polluting tribe, and consequently the Badagas do not invite them to attend this auspicious ceremony. Yet the ties that link Badagas with Kotas are even closer than those with the Todas, and at every point in the ceremony the help of Kota craftsmen is evident. The iron bar (*'ha:re*) with which salt is powdered is made by Kotas particularly for this use; the iron rod (*'uppu'kol*) carried to the stream—which now serves no utilitarian purpose—is made by Kotas; the pot used in the ceremony was traditionally a Kota product although nowadays metal vessels from the market are often used instead; the small knife (*'uppu 'katti*) used in cutting the branches still comes from the Kotas; the hoe and any other tools used in digging the pits are made by Kotas; and the pot in which the meal is finally cooked was traditionally theirs as well. The cattle shed and pen would also have been constructed initially with [718] Kota help. Today, consequent upon a rift in 1928 between the Kotas and most Badaga hamlets, there is much less insistence that Kota products be used in this ceremony, but up to that time such insistence was the rule.

796 In summary, the salt-giving ceremony is one in which each Badaga hamlet expresses its hope and expectations for the bounties that come in the form of cattle, harvest, children, the village society, wild Nilgiri vegetation, and relations with the Toda and Kota tribes. To have the maximum effect in promoting these benefits ceremonially, the participating men put themselves into a state of ritual purity and take great care that nothing inauspicious foil their purpose on this day.

121 796 We can explain the structure of the salt-giving ceremony by reference to certain principles underlying the structure of Badaga society. The per-

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formance of the ceremony every year has the effect of regularly parading these principles before the eyes of the community; symbolic reference is made to the virtues and the loci of ritual purity, the sources of material benefits, and the role of the various social groupings and relationships that are the essence of Badaga village life.

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Early in this paper it was mentioned that the Todas and Kotas also give salt ceremonially to their buffaloes. Data on the Kota ceremony are not available but we will examine the Toda ceremony briefly to compare and contrast it with that of the Badagas.

Rivers (1906: 175-181), in his authoritative work on the Todas, describes certain salt-giving ceremonies, but he does not provide a description of the ordinary ceremony held in the Toda hamlets. I am deeply indebted to Professor Murray B. Emeneau for making available to me, prior to publication, his notes on a Toda song about the ceremony in question.[10]

The Todas give salt to their buffaloes five times a year (Rivers 1906: 175). One of these occasions is the ceremony of *ko:r up* ("new-grass salt"), celebrated some time between February and April, following the winter frosts, when there are occasional showers and new grass is beginning to grow. On a day shortly after the new moon, after salt has been obtained from the Badagas, the priest first cleanses the dairy-temple with buffalo dung and carries out his usual morning rituals. He then brings out of the dairy a stick, a basket of salt, and a milking vessel containing some of that morning's milk and a little buttermilk. He goes up to the chief buffalo and pours this milk three times from his hand into the animal's mouth, saying *"hõ:"* each time. He then strikes this buffalo three times on its back with the stick.

After this, the priest puts the milking vessel back inside the dairy and goes off in search of hill mango bark. When he has got a supply of this bark,[11] he places three pieces in the stream at the point where the dairy herd is watered. He also puts three pieces of bark into the basket of salt that he has brought from the dairy-temple, and three other pieces into the milk. He has already, on the previous day, dug a round pit nearby to hold the salty water; into this he now deposits three more pieces of the bark. The priest next goes to the stream with a churning vessel. He fills this with water from the stream and puts salt and then bark into it. Rivers (1906: 176) notes that at each point where three pieces of bark are thrown (one after the other), the man utters the sound "Oũ" (i.e., *"hõ:"*) three times. The mixture of water, salt, and bark is poured into the pit. The chief buffalo and then the others in the herd are allowed to drink this; they are taken to the pit in groups of five or six, and if necessary the pit is filled with more salt and water but without adding more bark (Rivers 1906: 176).

When the buffaloes have finished drinking, the priest throws some grass three times into the pit, and also smears mud from the pit on his forehead. In this state he goes back inside the dairy-temple and brings out the buttermilk for the assembled men to drink. If any of them are in a state of pollution at this time because of a recent funeral in their particular clan, they are not allowed the buttermilk. Platefuls of puffed millet, a favorite

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000 ceremonial delicacy, are also served to those who are not polluted (Rivers 1906: 368-369). There follows singing and dancing among the men, some of whom have come from other Toda hamlets for the event.

Rivers (1906: 177) comments briefly: "The object of this ceremony is said to be that the buffaloes shall give a plentiful supply of milk." Part of Emeneau's translation of a song (no. 14) expressed more clearly what is in the minds of the Todas during this ceremony (I quote five verses from it; the rest of the song describes the ceremony and its setting):

Tell the clouds to rise in the sky!
Tell the shade to fall densely!
Tell the beautiful season of showers: "Come!"
Tell the beautiful dews: "Fall!"
Tell the buffalo which has calved a year or more ago:
"Give milk that runs over the handle of the milking vessel!"
Tell the one ball of butter: "Be filtered overflowing the kidy measure!"
Tell the barren woman: "Bear a child!"
Tell the barren buffalo: "Bear a calf!"
Tell all the sacred places: "Bless us!"
Tell all the gods: "Do charity!"

N1 It will be noticed that the wishes expressed in this part of the song are almost identical with those we have recorded in the prayer of the Badagas.

Aside from the general intent of this ceremony, we can see that certain of its features parallel the Badaga institution. The priest is in a pure state, and he sprinkles buffalo dung on the floor of the dairy-temple before going out to perform the ceremony. The hole he has dug is of similar shape and size to the Badaga ones, and is located by a stream. Most of the ritual acts are performed three times; as Rivers (1906: 412-413) observes, three is an especially sacred number, and many ritual acts are performed three times. Bark from a wild plant considered highly sacred by the Todas is used in this ceremony as well as certain other rituals. In all these respects the ceremony is closely similar to the Badaga one: it is performed at the same time of year, and it bears a name cognate to the Badaga *'ka:ruppu*.

121 Yet there are also important differences. The Toda ceremony is per-
796 formed by the priest alone, on behalf of his entire hamlet. In the Badaga institution, representatives of each family as well as their leaders take roles in it. In fact, it is characteristic of the Toda dairy rituals that only the man who has been sanctified as priest can perform them. As Rivers (1906: 244-245) says:

> The impurity of the ordinary man does not prevent him from visiting the dairies of the lower grade, but it prohibits him from taking any part whatever in the actual dairy operations. . . . He is perhaps regarded as unsanctified rather than impure.

The cattle shed, the green, and the home play no part in the Toda salt-giving ceremony; and the ceremonial food which is prepared by men and offered to the gathering does not include some of the priest's salt. Women, it is clear, do not play the "backstage" part in the Toda ceremony

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121 that they do in the Badaga one. This is in keeping with the Toda practice
796 of keeping women altogether separate from anything that touches upon the herding of buffaloes and the rituals of the dairy-temple, for fear that they pollute the sacrosanct (Rivers 1906: 245).

000 For the Todas, this is a ceremony which makes reference to what is important in the man's religious life: the priest, the grades of purity, the dairy-temple, the various grades of buffalo, the stream water, and the highly sacred hill mango tree. It is only after the ceremony has been completed and men are singing and dancing that songs may refer, as we have seen, to the more secular blessings of Toda life: calves, rain showers, plentiful milk, and fertile women, as well as the hope for divine favors.

From the field work of Rivers and Emeneau it therefore appears that social groupings are not made visible in the Toda ceremony to the extent that they are in the comparable Badaga one. What is highly visible in the Toda ceremony, however, is an important principle of social differentiation: ceremonial purity. Only the priests are ceremonially pure; ordinary Toda men acting as onlookers lack this purity and so cannot perform dairy rituals. Some men are polluted by having recently attended funerals for fellow clansmen. Men who are so affected should mark the fact by tying their hair in a knot on the front of the head; they are not permitted to drink the buttermilk or eat the festive puffed millet that others who watch the salt-giving are offered.

783 Women, because of their lack of purity, do not attend any dairy cere-
561 monies. In Badaga society, however, ritual purity, although a desired personal state, is not the important principle of social organization that it is for Todas and for Hindu castes living elsewhere in India; the Badagas emphasize seniority of status instead.

121 In both Toda and Badaga communities the salt-giving is treated as a sacred ritual rather than a routine act of cattle herding; in both there is some indication of what material blessings man hopes for, and in both ceremonies a major principle of social organization is made visible to participants. We may recall the generalization of Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 17): "In primitive societies any things that have important effects on the social life necessarily become the objects of ritual observances . . . , the function of such ritual being to express, and so to fix and perpetuate, the recognition of the social value of the objects to which it refers."

At the outset of this paper we juxtaposed the traditional communication media of ceremonialism and informal conversation with the new mass media of the press, film, radio, and the poster. It remains only to ask whether these new media have had any effect on the performance of annual rituals such as those we have been analyzing.

It is true that mass media have very much changed both the content of and the time devoted to informal conversations. Villagers now tend to spend less time in gossiping and yet discuss a wider variety of subjects than they used to. Conversation often amounts to a re-evaluation of accepted norms and farming methods which takes into account new information that has reached the villagers from the mass media.

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But no great change has come in salt-giving and the other important rituals of either the Badagas or the Todas. Indeed, only one general change is apparent in recent performances of the traditional ceremonies: they are done with a minimum of wasted time. Now that Badagas and even some Todas have become involved in the marketing economy, they have less time to spend idly, since time now means income. They tend to perform ritual acts with some haste, and they do not always feel concerned if a minor item in the ritual sequence is altogether omitted from a particular performance. Public opinion still favors as authentic a performance as possible, however, for the relationship between the continued performance of the rituals and the continuance of the social order is even today believed to be a real and crucial one.

Wallace's contention that rituals do not have an information function has, we hope, been qualified by this paper. The kind of information which a ritual such as salt-giving presents is information not available from any other source, whether mass media or traditional oral channels. Neither government nor gossip can reassure a community on the matter of its continued existence as a community; only the periodic re-enactment of roles and the reassertion of traditional values in the indigenous ceremonies of a culture can give Badagas, Todas, and other rural communities the security of knowing that their own particular way of life is both persistent and worthwhile.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to the American Institute of Indian Studies for a fellowship which enabled me to do field research there in 1962-63. The present paper has been written with the help of a grant from the Chancellor's Committee on International and Comparative Studies, University of California at Los Angeles. I am also grateful to M. N. Thesingh, a Badaga Lingayat who provided much of the material, and to John Hitchcock for his helpful criticism.

2. Terracing of slopes and the fragmentation of fields through divided inheritance have resulted, since the 1930s, in fields being too small to plough.

3. Numbering 85,463 persons in the 1961 Census.

4. During the past fifty years some hamlets have included the salt-giving ceremony in their sowing festival. This is convenient because it saves some time and expense on preparations; yet the two ceremonies remain quite distinct from one another.

5. Large groups of Badagas and Kotas used to go together to the market town of Gundlupet in southern Mysore, or to Karamadai, near Coimbatore. They carried hay, honey, opium, and clarified butter with them, and bartered these for salt, crude sugar, rice, coconut, tobacco, and trinkets.

6. Initially trade in the Ootacamund bazaar was handled through barter, but by about 1840 cash had become the general medium.

7. Called *'uppu kuk'ke*, "salt basket," this is made of cane by the Todas, stands about nine inches high (including the loop handle), and is smeared inside and out with cow dung.

8. The term *'hubbe* is used for six species of Leguminosae found at varying altitudes on the Nilgiri Hills. These are (1) the hill forest indigo; (2) the New Spain senna; (3) the tick trefoil; (4) the bell pea or Chinese pagoda tree; (5) *Dumasia villosa;* and (6) mountain downy senna.

9. Otherwise known as bastard mango or honeysweet tree.

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000 10. Except where reference to Rivers' book is acknowledged, the following description is based on notes given me by Dr. Emeneau.
11. By chipping it from the tree with a stone (Rivers 1906: 434).

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